

FLASH

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Consumers recognize importance of health benefits

Consumers are paying more attention to the foods they buy that reap benefits. Although they often cannot name the specific food component in the food they desire, they do know which food is beneficial for them.

Healthy labeling has become a popular trend sought out by consumers, said Krista Smith, business and marketing intern for the Robert M. Kerr Food & Agricultural Products Center.

“Consumers are becoming proactive and desire natural remedies, instead of medicinal treatments,” Smith said. “Healthy labels point out the benefits supplied from the product, according to the labels; consumers in turn, buy the product because of its benefits and not the product itself.”

According to the November/December 2007 *Food Insight* newsletter, published by the International Food Information Council Foundation, a food and health survey was completed to identify consumer attitudes of health-promoting foods.

The survey found the top 10 beneficial foods included fruits and vegetables; fish, fish oil and seafood; milk and other dairy products; whole grains, including oats, oat bran and oatmeal; fiber; green tea; meat; water; certain herbs and spices; and nuts.

In addition, the components consumers are shopping for in these foods

are calcium and vitamin D for bone health, fiber for maintaining a healthy digestive system, and omega-3 fatty acids and soy protein for reducing the risk of heart disease.

The survey found as consumers prioritize their health concerns, cardiovascular health ranks number one, followed by weight and cancer. And, consumers are retrieving the majority of their nutrition awareness from the Internet, doctors, television, magazines and friends.

Furthermore, according to the newsletter, after discovering that trans fats and saturated fats are extremely unhealthy, the number of Americans trying to consume less polyunsaturated fats increased by 9 percent.

“Consumers are not only selecting healthful choices, but they also are trying to avoid foods that may contain harmful ingredients,” said Chuck Wiloughby, FAPC business and marketing relations manager.

The *Food Insight* newsletter reports consumers are concerned that antibiotics used to treat livestock still remain in the food products they consume such as milk and meat. However, the Food and Drug Administration has a “withdrawal time” to make certain the antibiotics have cleared the livestock’s system.

According to the newsletter, antimicrobial resistance associated with meat and milk is another concern

of consumers; however, this issue is addressed through the FDA.

The FDA requires companies to provide data and information that allows it to determine whether the drug would cultivate antimicrobial resistance in animals that could be potentially passed on to humans through consumption.

Although some research has suggested the elimination of antibiotic drugs from animal production may have little positive effect on resistant bacteria that threaten human health, researchers are uncertain of the extent that antibiotic use in livestock truly advances to antibiotic resistant infections in humans.

According to the Hartman Group’s report *Organic Food & Beverage Trends 2004: Lifestyles, Language and Category Adoption*, 66 percent of Americans said they occasionally use organic products, an increase from 55 percent in 2000.

“A surge in periphery organic shoppers—those who buy organic products only occasionally—has been largely driven by increased access to organic products in mainstream markets, heightened concern about health, gradual emergence of organic alternatives in mainstream brands, and an increase in information sources,” according to the report. “Lifestyle, rather than demographics, is driving organic purchases.”